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Geographical explanation of the factors disputed in the Karabakh geopolitical crisis

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ABSTRACT

Geopolitical crises are among the international crises that have geographic nature and root. Therefore, despite international political or economic crises that may have more negative consequences than those of geopolitical ones, no crisis threatens the nations-states' factors as do geopolitical crises because the specialty of geographic basis is rooted in national and prestigious values. Thus, the compromise about them is quite hard and impossible, and these crises often last so long. In this regard, if a geopolitical crisis, like the case of Karabakh, is rooted in bilateral disputes over geographic factors, including geographic-political, geographic-cultural and geographic-economic factors, it would have special complexities.

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1. Introduction

The history of the scientific studies on international crises is not long. At the mid-20th century some academic scientific and diplomatic political communities in the United States and England began to study international crises for the first time aimed at comparing them and determining their components as well as finding a model to predict and prevent them. The study of the international crises and the investigation of their management methods in the current complex global system are of great importance from various aspects. Knowing the crisis roots and reasons and the various kinds of international crises as well as their consequences that pave the way to correctly manage the states' foreign policy can be effective in reducing the negative consequences of these crises. Strategically, theoretical understanding is one of the methods to prevent the crises in international environment. In other words, the more precise studies and the more

profound analyses of the crises aspects and their reasons, the better and the more perfect recognition of them.

Investigation of different works in the domain of international crisis shows us that there is a theoretical vacuum in this relation. The deficiency that emanates from this matter is that no one has distinguished international crisis from geopolitical crisis. In fact, scholars have not considered geographic background where the crisis has taken place. Like other researches in the domain of international crisis, different researches related to the Karabakh crisis have not characterized that the crisis is a geopolitical crisis or a political crisis (see for example [International Crisis Group, 2005](#), and [De Wall, 2008](#)). Rather, these researches have not considered geographic background of the crisis (see for example [Cornell, 1999](#)). Current study tries to fill this gap. In fact, presenting a theoretical framework to distinguish geopolitical crisis and political crisis and characterizing different factors leading to the conflict and forces behind these factors make the research distinct from other works. In other words, we try to investigate the crisis from geopolitical point of view.

Geopolitical crises are those with geographic roots as their most distinct characteristic. Therefore, the main question is:

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what are the reasons of these crises? How can one explain the geographic factors affecting the geopolitical crises in a strategic analysis? Therefore, although various reasons and even political factors may create and prolong the geopolitical crises, the current study attempts to study and analyze the geographic factors affecting the geopolitical crises, including geographic-political, geographic-cultural and geographic-economic dimensions in the context of Karabakh geopolitical crisis through analytic-descriptive method.

2. What is a geopolitical crisis?

Before investigating the geopolitical crisis, this debate requires a comprehensive definition of the critical region. Region is the geographic context of any geographic-political phenomenon, in particular geopolitical crisis. If all factors constructing crisis are clearly distinguished and recognized, critical region has a distinctive geographic identity. Unlike convergent geopolitical regions, in critical regions there are no structurally or functionally homogeneous geographies. In these special regions, identity-finding of the region requires its elements to find political importance. In other words, critical regions should be considered as the result of the states' different and conflicted attitudes toward the structural and functional elements and characteristics of geographic region, which take identity in the context of states' competition or disputes (Valigholizadeh, 2012, p. 94) (Diagram 1).

Usually, according to the nature and the level of structural and functional homogeneity, geopolitical regions in their evolutionary process either reach geopolitical completeness (integration of states and mutual cooperation) or reach geopolitical regression (divergence and arising geopolitical crisis). In other words, if in the identity-finding process of a region divergent forces are prevalent, geopolitical structure will face a different destiny named geopolitical regression. In fact, if divergent forces following negative diplomacy, conflicted approaches and ideologies, disputes over geopolitical interests, territorial-cultural disputes in

geographic-political chess of region, and intervention of trans-regional actors prevail, divergence forces overcome integrative forces; consequently, divergence develops in the context of deep political-geopolitical disputes that are very likely to bring about regional instability and chaos, which could lead to conflict and war in the region. Therefore, due to the geographic-cultural homogeneity of the region, it is quite natural that the consequences of any possible dispute over geographic-political values or interests between the states can affect the whole region and thus critical region or geopolitical crisis is created due to such an instable sphere (Valigholizadeh, 2012, p. 95).

Geopolitical crises are specific crisis among international crises with geographic-political roots, which is its most significant characteristic. Although international, political or economic crises, which may have negative consequences and global reflections, are more than those of geopolitical crises, none of these crises threatens the nations-states' entity factors as geopolitical crises can do (Valigholizadeh, 2012, p. 95).

Geopolitical crisis is the consequence of conflict and dispute between states and organized political-spatial groups or political actors over controlling and seizing both natural and human geographic values and factors. The two significant characteristics of geopolitical crisis are as follows: they are stable and persistent and they are not easily resolved, because causes of crisis are geographic values that are among the national and collective interests. In other words, nations know them as collective and national interests; therefore, they are not negligible and compromise on them is hard. In contrast to the popular perception of international crises, geopolitical crises, despite their trans-regional political nature, are quite different from international-political crisis. Political crises are the consequence of tension in the context of relations between states and may be resulted in decreasing in or cutting the relations and even war between them. However, despite the long-standing nature of geopolitical crises, political crises are temporary and easily resolved (Hafeznia, 2006, pp. 126–128) (Diagram 2).

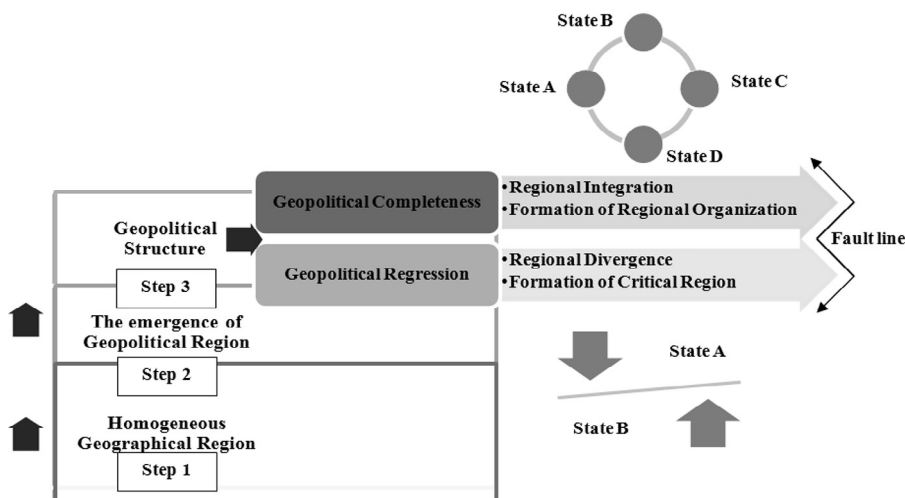


Diagram 1. The process of critical region formation (A. Valigholizadeh).

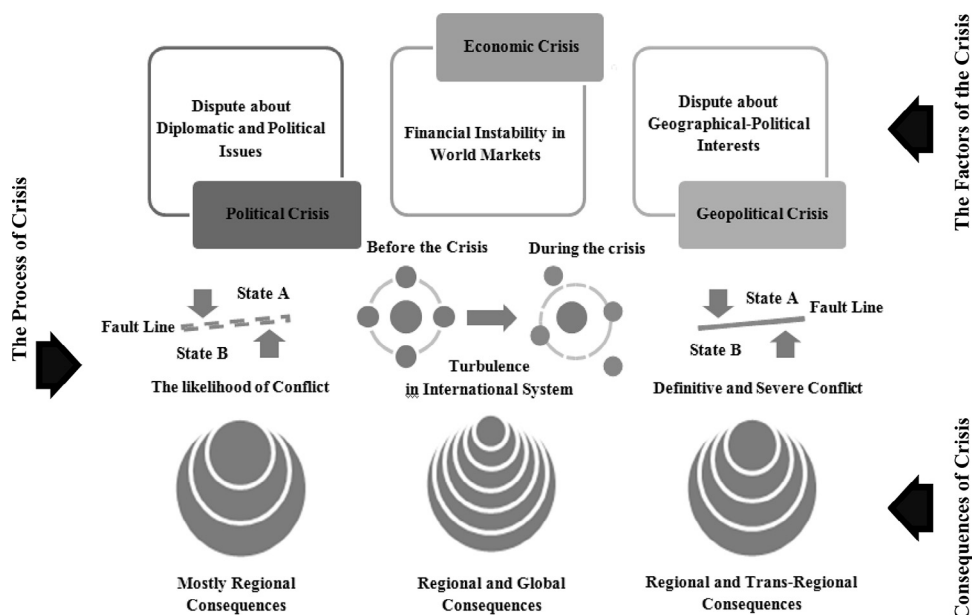


Diagram 2. The special types of international crises (A. Valigholizadeh).

In contrast, resolving geopolitical crisis requires good-will and friendly relations between states involved in the crisis (Mojtahedzadeh, 2000, p. 176), dividable geographic values or conflicted interests (the way that all of actors obtain their own appropriate share), and unbalanced power relations (it means that one of the conflicting states is the superior power and by its authority is able to convince the other state or states, and control the disputed geographic value). But, if a geopolitical crisis cannot be resolved through peaceful methods and if its continuity causes impatience in conflicting states, and if the sense of evolution in power balance or the sense of threat is formed, it could lead to war. Also, one of the most significant traits of geopolitical crisis is the formation of the pattern of multi-level intervention, i.e. different actors are engaged.

In fact, contrary to international economic crises that are normally caused by financial instability in international markets and contrary to political crises that are formed by diplomatic tensions or disagreements of states in foreign policy about political, economic issues and so on, geopolitical crises have a geographic nature aimed at controlling and seizing the national values and geographic factors. This is because the basis of geopolitical crises is geographic-political values and national interests (vital factors of nations-states), and the matter inherently produces geopolitical interests and concerns for powerful actors and periphery sphere of the crisis.

Therefore, despite all other economic and political crises, geopolitical crises have perfect geographic identity and nature. In fact, all geopolitical crises result from disputes or conflicts of nations on ownership of geographic values. Also, geographic values are different, and these different types are clearly visible in some geopolitical crises; although the individual geographic value is able to create geopolitical crisis. Consequently, according to what will be discussed in the current study about the geographic factors

of geopolitical crises, to know these geographic factors especially to logically direct the states' foreign policy, geographic factors of these crises can be analyzed in three different domains, including geographic-political, geographic-cultural and geographic-economic.

- Geographic-political factors consist of geographic values that have a political nature; for instance, when the nations' independence and territorial integrity, national unity and their basic values are attacked or claimed by other nations, then geopolitical conflicts are formed among nations. The situation may lead to geopolitical crises because of the inability of states to understand the current conditions. Territorial claims and disputes containing different types of boundary disputes and territorial sovereignty are among the most important and familiar types of geographic-political factors of geopolitical crises. Usually, these geopolitical crises, which are rooted in territorial disputes and conflicts, cover the regional and international levels because of the dynamic and common nature of conflicted values between peripheral regions.
- Geographic-cultural factors of geopolitical crisis are related to those geographic values that have a cultural nature. In this regard, nations' competition and their conflict in the cultural interests can be pointed out. These geographic factors are among the geo-cultural factors of disputes and conflicts between nations. Ancient lingua-ethnic competitions and disputes, extreme nationalism and fascist tendencies, religions competitions and disputes, ideological encountering and attempts to develop cultural values and criteria or values of a country and support the civilians in neighboring countries are among these activities. In fact, geographic-cultural factors of geopolitical crises result in the type of spatial interactions of the heterogeneous neighboring geographies

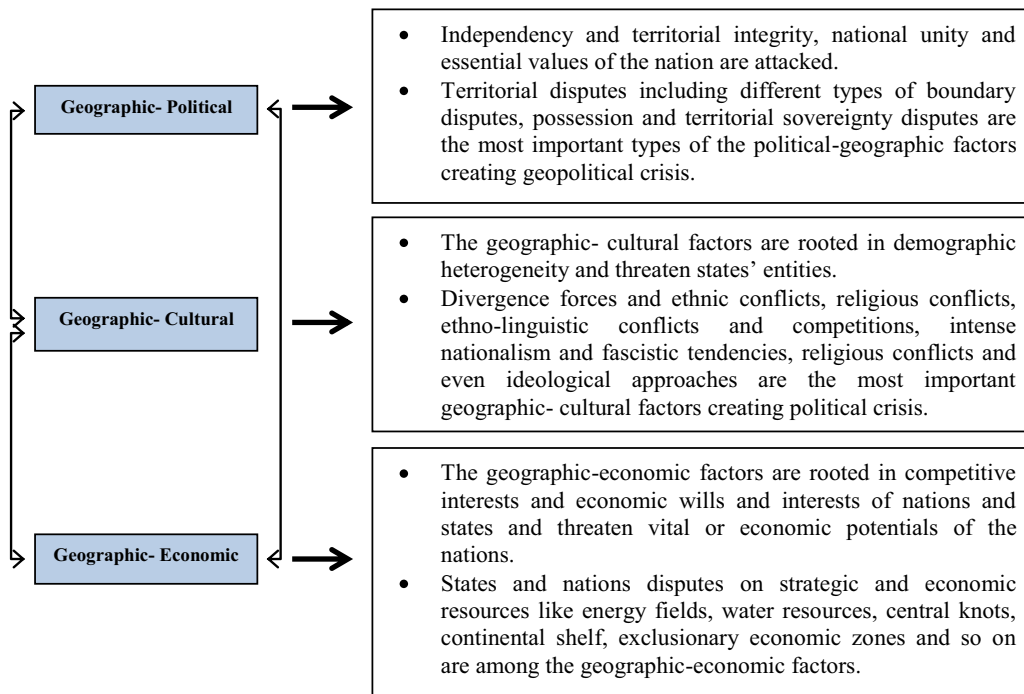


Diagram 3. Geographic factors creating geopolitical crisis.

with populations, and usually the most important reasons in arising such geographic-cultural competitions and disputes are the states' special interests and macro-strategies in political organization of the space as well as the rival and hostile states' exploitation of the geographic-cultural potentials of the space in the geopolitical competitions. Religious tensions and disputes are the other forms of ethnic conflicts and geographic-cultural factors for geopolitical crises, rooted in religious competition and disputes. In addition to ethnic conflicts, in the last decades many religious conflicts have occurred around the world such as Kosovo, Karabakh, Chechnya and Sri Lanka. Studies reveal that in such conflicts, which lead to geopolitical crises, religion plays a more crucial role in constructing ethnic community or arising nationalist ideals than those of customs.

- Geographic-economic factors belong to those geographic values with economic-political nature, which result from nations or states' competitive interests, economic ideals and wishes, and threaten vital potentials or the economy of the states. Today, on the one hand, the importance of the geo-economic issues have been highlighted in relation to the geopolitical and geostrategic issues, and on the other hand, states' geo-economic disputes have been subjective than others for nations. So, states' disputes over the strategic resources and economic potentials are among geographic- cultural factors of geopolitical crisis. International disputes over economic resources affect simply economic and political stability of the wide area of conflicted region. It may even lead to a change in the pattern of regional relations and a more complicated situation. In this regard, economic and strategic resources play an important role in

territorial tensions, disputes and conflicts as the main subjective territorial indicators. Therefore, regions with economic potentials are the centers of geopolitical crises and considered as the sensitive world regions.

In general, the geographic factors causing geopolitical crisis can be summarized according to [Diagram 3](#).

3. Background and manifestations of geopolitical crisis of Karabakh

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Caucasus has seen one of the most violent and intractable conflicts, where ethnic assertiveness exploded in the 1990s as a result of policies of ethnic manipulation and politicization. As states were born unexpectedly out of the collapse of the Soviet empire, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan confronted with simultaneous problems of forging nationhood and the re-emergence of subdued national aspirations.

Among the three conflicts in the Caucasus, the conflict over Karabakh with its mixture of separatism and irredentism has represented the most complex and intricate pattern of the territory–identity linkage and is revealing in terms of conflicting interpretations over the right to self-determination and the principle of territorial integrity. Although a cease-fire has been effective since May 1994, it can be legitimately claimed that the “relative quiet is an eerie, delicate, deceptive balance” ([Menon et al, 1999, p. 11](#)), as the question as to who has the legitimate right to Karabakh remains a deep-rooted and emotional source of suspicion, fear, and potential violence.

The dispute of Karabakh has its roots far in the past. Since its incorporation by Russia at the beginning of the nineteenth

century, the status of the area has been problematic. More recently, the status of the autonomous oblast of Karabakh began to pose serious challenges to the politics of Michael Gorbachev, strongly demonstrating the underlying seriousness of the ethnics' problem in the Soviet Union and the way they could jeopardize the process of democratization. Against the background of glasnost and perestroika, it was a call to alleviate the injustices that occurred related to ethnic groups during the communist rule, which primarily galvanized opposition political forces in the Caucasus. In this respect, Karabakh was the most blatant example of the inconsistency of Moscow's ethnics' policy that alienated the nations and ethnic groups from the center.

Almost two years before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the contradictory policies of the central authorities toward inter-ethnic tensions in the region and actually turned Karabakh into a catalyst for identical political tendencies in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, these common tendencies can be characterized by their vocal anti-Moscow sentiment, which caused a strong drive toward secession and being independent as the only perceived way of protecting their own interests.

As Altstadt (1994) has pointed out, "at the most fundamental level the clash concerns a piece of land", which the peoples of both Armenia and Azerbaijan "regard as historic patrimony and the present conflict is therefore bound up with historical claims" dating back to distinct periods of development: the upsurge of the Armenian and Azerbaijani national movements in the nineteenth century; the period of independence of Armenia and Azerbaijan after World War I and the Bolshevik decisions; and the rise of national assertiveness in the 1980s (p. 104).

The conflict over Karabakh that unfolded in the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union can therefore be seen as a complicated pattern of past and present claims to territory. These claims have been advanced primarily in historical term, which has limited the processes of nation- and state-building in the two countries. In this way, the conflict has been built up on a series of increasing claims and counter-claims, which each ethnic group, majority or minority, claimed the exclusive right to the disputed territory. Herzig (1999) argues that "the strength of attachment to these claims reflects the specific Caucasian Soviet culture, in which both official and dissident thinkers gave history a privileged place in validating contemporary political and territorial claims" (p. 59).

During the first half of the 1990s, when the conflict reached its highest degree of intensity and endurance, scholars tried to explain the parties' motives in terms ranging from religious animosity between Muslims and Christians, ethnic enmity between Armenians and Turks, and the manipulation by outside forces. For the Karabakh Armenians, on the one side, the conflict has been a struggle for independence, which is perceived as the only guarantor of their security, especially outside the Soviet structure and within a newly independent country that is struggling to assert its national identity to the international arena. The Armenians regard Karabakh as part of their historical territory where their right to self-determination should be preserved. Thus, Hunter (1994) has observed that Armenians fear that the loss of Karabakh could shift the ethnic

balance in favor of Azerbaijan and might lead to "Armenia's demographic marginalization in the region" (p. 105).

For Azerbaijan, on the other hand, the security of the region can be guaranteed only by reaffirming and safeguarding the principles of the respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of states. The Azerbaijanis fear that the separation of Karabakh would be the beginning of Azerbaijan's disintegration. Moreover, for Azerbaijan the conflict is not between Karabakh and itself, but between Azerbaijan and Armenia's purported territorial claims.

4. The main geographic factors disputed in Karabakh geopolitical crisis

4.1. Territorial claims and disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan

Because of the main differences in contradictory approaches of Armenia and Azerbaijan to territorial issues, there is no any specific and certain opinion in this regard (İşyar, 2004, p. 101). According to the political-historical studies, this geopolitical problem is rooted in political philosophy of "Great Armenia" project. In fact, historical studies reveal that Armenians had no political-geographical organization and they lacked integrity and were dispersed in Ottoman, Iran and Russia until the Russian moved toward South Caucasia. Therefore, in 19th century the project of "Great Armenia" was introduced by the Armenian religious elites and the leaders under the neo-nationalism thoughts. They believed that this project would guarantee their getting rid of dispersion in the context of the historical political events. However, in that era, Armenia did not have specific geographical and legal borders, and have also no territory that could be the Great Armenia territory (Onur Sayılan, 2007, p. 16).

So, the conflict started and Armenians rioted in Ottoman territories, and consequently many Armenians were killed and exiled. Analyses show that Armenians relied on the kind of psychology to prevent their ethnic-geographic collapse. Therefore, it seems that Armenian territorial claims and disputes in Karabakh are rooted in the Armenians' wills in preserving their latest dwelled territories, which are today outside of the country's borders (Onur Sayılan, 2007, p. 17), while the historical-geographical concept of Armenia is not consistent with the ancient territories of the Armenians.

Also, it should be pointed out that territorial claims of the Armenians in Karabakh may be interpreted in the framework of the Great Armenian project aimed at dominating the ancient Armenian territories in line with Russian geopolitical approach. The Great Armenia formation project in the current Armenian territory and some parts of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey was presented by Dashnaks, which has been the main priority for the Armenian activists specially after Russia's presence in the region and specifically in the framework of Russian geopolitical approaches (encountering the influence of Turkey and Iran in Caucasia and developing a strategic passage to access the fresh waters) and their strategic supports. They justify the problem in this way: in the first century (AD) there was a state called Armenia in the above mentioned territories and it must have been revived. Therefore, it seems that the

border disputes between Georgia and Armenia, Armenian's hostile relations with Turkey and the project of attachment of Karabakh to Armenia and occupation of other parts of Azerbaijan, all have been conducted to realize the Great Armenia project. In other words, the Armenian geopolitics is formed throughout the history in the context of a kind of nationality–territory scorn psychology versus the peripheral territories and consequently attempts to realize the aspirations of territorial identity.

In this regard, a kind of epic and resistance literature has been powerfully developed between Armenians i.e. “oh my son, this is Ararat Mountain a part of your territory which is occupied by Turks. Your territory is too vast to be imagined. You must make it free if you attained the power” (Tabatabai, 2005, p. 89). On the other hand, the position of such epic literature in Azerbaijan is the same as that of Armenia. Karabakh Shikastasi is a sample of an epic literary work that refers to the concept of “I never forget Karabakh” with an identical-territorial context that affects the heart of every hearer even non-Turks. This epic literature contains such territorial belonging sentiments that lead Armenians and Azerbaijanis to consider Karabakh as the “promised territory” where they seek their historical roots.

Another point affecting the two nations' territorial disputes and claims seriously is the problem of illegitimacy and ambiguity in borderlines. It was among the most problematic issues in Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union, the borders of states were determined regardless of homogeneous ethnic characteristics (Arfai, 1992, p. 169) and they were just based on the Russians' national-political considerations. In fact, the legitimacy problem of the borders of Karabakh emanated from this issue that while Karabakh is geographically next to the Armenia, it is separated from Armenia by a narrow strip. The same position is true about Nakhchivan, which is quite inhabited by Azerbaijanis and has been completely separated from Azerbaijan by Armenia. Also, the recognition of Karabakh's autonomy means the recognition of a separated territorial identity, which itself has made the situation more vague (Vaezi, 2007, pp. 164–165).

Because of the identical and geographical nature of dispute, the Karabakh issue has become a perfectly national-prestigious problem between the two nations. On the one hand, Azerbaijanis consider Karabakh as a complementary territory of the country and claim that Karabakh is an Azerbaijani name that indicates its belonging to the Turks. On the other hand, Armenians claim the ownership over Karabakh and believe that this territory has always been resided by the Armenians since early Christian era with its historical name “Artsakh” and is a complementary part of the Armenian mountains (Amir Ahmadian, 2010, p. 72). Therefore, regarding the nature of these geopolitical assumptions about Karabakh, it seems that if the involving actors decide to solve this crisis in favor of Azerbaijan, the Armenian government would face some challenges, because with the excuse of the war, Armenians has suffered from economic crisis, corruption, unemployment etc.

It must be noted that in Armenia, any flexibility in Karabakh issue is seen as a great betrayal to the Armenians. Therefore, the parliament on April 28, 2001 knew the peace condition as its independence or complete attachment to Armenia based on international recognition. Even

the overthrow of Petrosian government through the coup d'état by Kucharian and Sarkisian is justified on this basis of resolving Karabakh issue by Petrosian. For this reason, the next administrations in Armenia took very hard positions in this regard. They are even forbidden to use the term “occupied territories” for the peripheral territories of Karabakh. The use of the term would be accompanied by negative political consequences for them.

4.2. Population displacement in Karabakh

Basically, the geographic-cultural factors of Karabakh geopolitical crisis should be investigated related to engineering the political geography of the ethnic groups and nations settled in the Soviet Union in the context of the Russian nationalistic considerations and geopolitical strategies. The main point is that Soviet leaders separated different peoples, and replaced them in newly established administrative and political units. The result of this “nationality engineering” is a dangerous combination of nations, ethnic groups that exist currently inside different countries. In fact, a glance at the new republics in Caucasia reveals that the displacements of ethnic groups and consequently artificial nature and complexity in socio-cultural and political borders are clues for potential crisis in the region and this issue is able to hurt the political-geopolitical stability of the region. In this regard, Karabakh is among the most important regions that have experienced a kind of population displacement in the framework of geographic-political and administrative structure of Russians and now its results can be observed in the context of geopolitical crisis of Karabakh. Of course, this displacement has been conducted according to the Russian geopolitical considerations.

The truth is that after Russians' dominance Karabakh has faced bitter political and ethnic events. Russia settled various groups in this region aimed at applying these communities as their own military bases. Caucasia has significant importance for Russia. So, they have always attempted to add the Armenian population in this region to end the presence of Turks and Iranians in this region, regarding that Armenian's Christian identity is a great privilege for Russia. Based on this approach and regarding religious disputes, Armenians may be potentially able to preserve Russian's interests in the region. Therefore, joining the new groups of Armenians to Karabakh's Christian population paves the way for the presence of Russians in Caucasia (Hurç, 2008, p. 7). It must be reminded that when Russians entered Karabakh region, majority of its population were the Muslim Turks, but then it changed into Christian Armenians.

Meanwhile, 18,000 Armenian were settled in Karabakh by Russia in 1825–1826. Until 1827 majority of Yerevan population (containing all the present Armenian's territories) were Turks. At the time, genocide and forced migration of Muslim population prepared an appropriate opportunity for Russia to settle Iranian and Ottoman Armenians in the region (McCarthy, 1998, p. 13). In fact, statistical studies show that before occupying the region by Russia, Armenians made up 20 percent of the east of Armenia, and 80 percent were Muslims; however migration of 57,000 Iranian and Ottoman Armenians to the region and migration of 35,000 Muslims from east of Armenia changed the population geography of

the region (Arfai, 1992, p. 162). Also, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenians forced Karabakh's Azerbaijanis to migrate to Azerbaijan. Therefore, as a result of this policy, the Armenian population in Karabakh, which were 5000 in 1970–1979 and 9000 in 1959–1970, increased to 80,000 individuals in 1970–1979 suddenly (Taghavi-e Asl, 2005, p. 104).

Religions-ethnic disputes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis

As pointed out above, following the population movements in Karabakh, the geographic-cultural factors are formed in the context of conflicts, whose roots should be searched in religious-ethnic disputes of Christian Armenians and Muslim Azerbaijanis.

Some commentators believe that conflicts among societies that have cultural contradictions would be more severe and profound because culture is among the most efficient variables in political, social and economic interactions of the nations, and it consists of various elements including nations' ceremonies, historical common customs, language and religion that each of them has important effects on the nations' understanding of different phenomena, and their interactions. Cultural commonalities can play an important role in common understanding the regional and global interactions and also can pave the way for agreement. However, cultural contradictions are indicators of the basic disputes among nations. Cultural contradiction is a variable that changes the simple disputes into severe ones and in some cases insolvable crises. Even, throughout the history there are just few communities that have cultural contradictions that have been able to live together, peacefully (Karami, 1995, p. 469).

With regard to the dispute indicators of the two nations, Karabakh crisis is the result of the religious and ethnic conflicts. In fact Azerbaijani and Armenian religious and ethnic identity differences are very deep. Azerbaijanis have some interests in both Islamic world (in large scale) and in Turkish-language world (with limited scale but more important). They consider themselves as a great nation that cannot be diminished. Most of them are Shiite, and so they have special position in the Islamic world, while they have specific position in Turkish world, too. On the other hand, Armenians also have the same position because of their special religious identity (being orthodox) among the widespread Christian world. But what makes this position more special is that Armenians due to living in non-Christian environments (among Muslims) and experiencing different types of tension and disputes have the sense of being surrounded and the sense of being collapsed as a minor religious-ethnic group by enemies (Abasov & Khachatryan, 2006, p. 92), and probably that is why that the subjects of religion and ethnicity have been viewed as one phenomenon in Armenian history (Hurç, 2008, p. 28).

Denying the others' identities face the world with the challenge of clash of civilizations (religions), religious conflicts and nations' disputes and lead to server deadlocks. This problem is perfectly visible in historical memories of Armenians and Azerbaijanis. In fact, the nations are full of historical memories with hatred and abhorrence about the other. There are some controversial points concerning

the problem of genocide and ethnic cleansing. Both nations believe that they have been victims of the other side's fascist policies. Azerbaijan emphasizes on occupation of 20 percent of its territories by Armenia and displacement of one million Azerbaijanis settled in Karabakh and believes that its national prestige and territorial rights have been hurt perfectly in the context of this ethnic disputes. Also, Azerbaijani people do not forget the attachment of some parts of their territory to Armenia by Russia, bloody conflicts in 1905 and the alliance of Armenia with Russia against Azerbaijan in 1918, and these are some of unpleasant historical memories. On the opposite front, because Armenians know the happenings occurred in 1915 as genocide, they have a very hostile view to Turkish people. The problem is that Armenians include Azerbaijanis in the happenings that occurred in 1915, because they do not separate Azerbaijanis from Turkish people. Moreover, they assume that the Azerbaijanis are responsible for bloody events in Sumgait and believe that these historical conflicts were started by Azerbaijanis. In fact, all of these developments as historical memories have been important in the conflict in the context of the two nations' national identity and ethnic prestige during their conflicts (Azimov, 2009, p. 265).

Finally, as the general analysis of the two nations' religious-ethnic disputes it can be said that beside the historical backgrounds of their hostility, the Armenian territorial claims over Karabakh which have made the ethnic contradictions and disputes more severe have been the most important factor in nation-state building process in Azerbaijan (Gürbüz, 2003, p. 87). On the other hand, in addition to the fascist identity-national self awareness sense among Armenians, their implication from Christianity, has a perfectly fascist nature.

4.3. The role of strategic potentials and economic importance of Karabakh in the bilateral disputes

Although many experts analyze Karabakh crisis in the framework of the religious-ethnic and territorial disputes, it should be noted that the strategic potentials and economic importance of Karabakh are effective in the complexity and prolongation of the crisis. The Karabakh is of great importance for both states, strategically and economically. Widespread grasslands of this region along with the vast lands proper for cultivation and its proper climate provide a favorable environment to the production of various plants and corps. Also, it contains expensive stone mines, which increase the importance of the region. In addition, it is covered by many rivers and springs that move toward Azerbaijan, which are vital to the country's economic life and its ecosystem. Therefore, it is obvious that if a region is dominated by another state, it can hurt the economy of Azerbaijan by controlling water resources. This issue may be applied as a pressure lever on Baku; in particular Azerbaijan has made various dams over these rivers and produces most of waterpower energy in this way. Also, some important rivers of Armenia that supply water for the Sun Lake in Armenia have their springs in Karabakh Mountains (Kazemi, 2005, p. 416–417).

The economic and vital importance of Karabakh increases when the Armenian geopolitical isolation is depicted

and analyzed in geopolitical chess of the Caucasia. In fact, the economic sanctions and territorial isolation of Armenia by Turkey and Azerbaijan have created large problems in Armenian's regional or international economic-political cooperation. For example, deleting the Armenia from the important transport and energy transmission projects of south Caucasia has brought many irreparable economic hurts for Armenia. In other words, the absence of Armenia in these projects means missing many economic opportunities that is required to start the new procedures that would certainly help Armenia to solve the national economic crisis and to move from centralized to free economy. So, Karabakh has a special economic significance in current situation for Armenia, because it is a passage to communicate with Iran (as the Armenia's strategic ally) through Aras shores in the south part of Karabakh as the breath channel for Armenia.

5. Analysis

Regarding the special nature of the dispute, Karabakh crisis has become an identical-prestigious reality between the two nations. So, regarding the national and prestigious importance of the territory for the two nations, solving the crisis means ignoring national pride of one of them. Armenians' sense of national-ethnic self awareness and their nationalist perception from Christianity take ethnic form in confrontation with Muslims. In other words, Christian Armenians is confronted with Muslim Azerbaijanis; this matter creates big gaps between them. In particular, when the matter is linked with a territorial factor (Karabakh) it creates the worst hostility between the two nations, to the extent that hate the other and strike the other have become a holy practice. The psychological pressure of the matter is to the extent that Armenians have known Karabakh as the hope and a tool for breaking their own all historical disabilities. They seek their historical identity in Karabakh. They are intended to respond to the historical surrounding through intruding on Karabakh and making a secure buffer in Karabakh. Mutually, Azerbaijanis have known themselves as the victims of Armenians' fascist politics in Karabakh and Armenia. This matter has caused Armenians to be as historical enemy of the Azerbaijanis. So, Karabakh crisis is a prestigious wound for Azerbaijanis that its solution is leaving out Armenia from Karabakh. In general, based on documents existed in the Karabakh crisis, the dispute over different geographic-national values has caused Karabakh become as a national and historical symbol for the two nations. The most important issue is that the representatives of which of nation are seen as the representative of people who have oppressed the others' national interests, mutually. Meanwhile, although the role of economic values in creating and deepening the Karabakh crisis is not as significant as territorial-identical values, the matter has a strategic role, simultaneously with continuing the crisis, in particular for the Armenia.

The other debate that has a direct relation with the geographic base of geopolitical crisis is the long-standing character of these crises which can be seen in the trend of Karabakh crisis. In other words, it is possible that a crisis like Karabakh that now is in the situation of no-peace and

no-war can be dormant, but its settlement requires time and national- political tolerance of the two sides related to the geographic- national values. So, because of the prestigious and vital importance of geographic values in the survival of nation-states, the settlement of geopolitical crisis, in particular Karabakh crisis is required to the settlement of geopolitical knots. In addition, research findings show that complexity of the actors' actions, factors affecting the crisis and also the complexity of the management and the settlement of the crisis emanate from the complex and prestigious nature of the geographic factors or values of the crisis. In other words, these are geographic values that have made contradictory interests for the players, and have made the factors affecting the crisis important and expound the nature and motives of the mediation to settle or to continue the crisis.

In general, based on research findings and theoretical debate of the research, the geographic factors of the Karabakh geopolitical crisis in the framework of geographic-political, geographic-cultural and geographic-economic factors are shown in [Diagram 4](#).

6. Conclusion

The geographic factors of the geopolitical crises can be investigated in three different domains, including geographic-political, geographic-cultural and geographic-economic. With this comprehensive cognition, an actor would be able to adapt well itself to the crisis' environment, crises' reasons and their possible consequences, the potential impact of crises, types and goals of the involved actors in crisis. For instance, if a geopolitical crisis has appeared just because of geographic-political reasons (such as territorial claims and borders disputes), the impact of its consequences would not be equal with that of geopolitical crises that resulted from geographic-cultural factors (religious and ethnic disputes). In a geopolitical crisis that resulted from geographic-cultural reasons, the impact of its consequences would be naturally larger because of the interconnectedness of geographic-cultural spaces (the crisis occurs in regions which suffer from ethnic and religious disputes, the cultural spaces' strategic influence goes across the neighboring countries' territorial depth). However, if the crisis is the result of all geographic-political, geographic-cultural and geographic-economic factors, the case will be more complex, as it is in Karabakh. In this regard, the studies about Karabakh geopolitical crisis reveal that many factors are involved in this crisis, including geographic-political (territorial claims and disputes between Azerbaijan and Armenia following the Great Armenia project aimed at keeping all the areas settled by Armenians, and ambiguity in the two states' borders), geographic-cultural (population displacement in Karabakh in the framework of Russians ethnics' "national engineering" policy to achieve geopolitical considerations in rivalry with Iran and Ottoman, and consequently appearance of religious-ethnic disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan) and geographic-economic (economic importance of Karabakh in the tow states' economic life). But, the role of geographic-political and geographic-cultural factors is more important than those of geographic-economic.

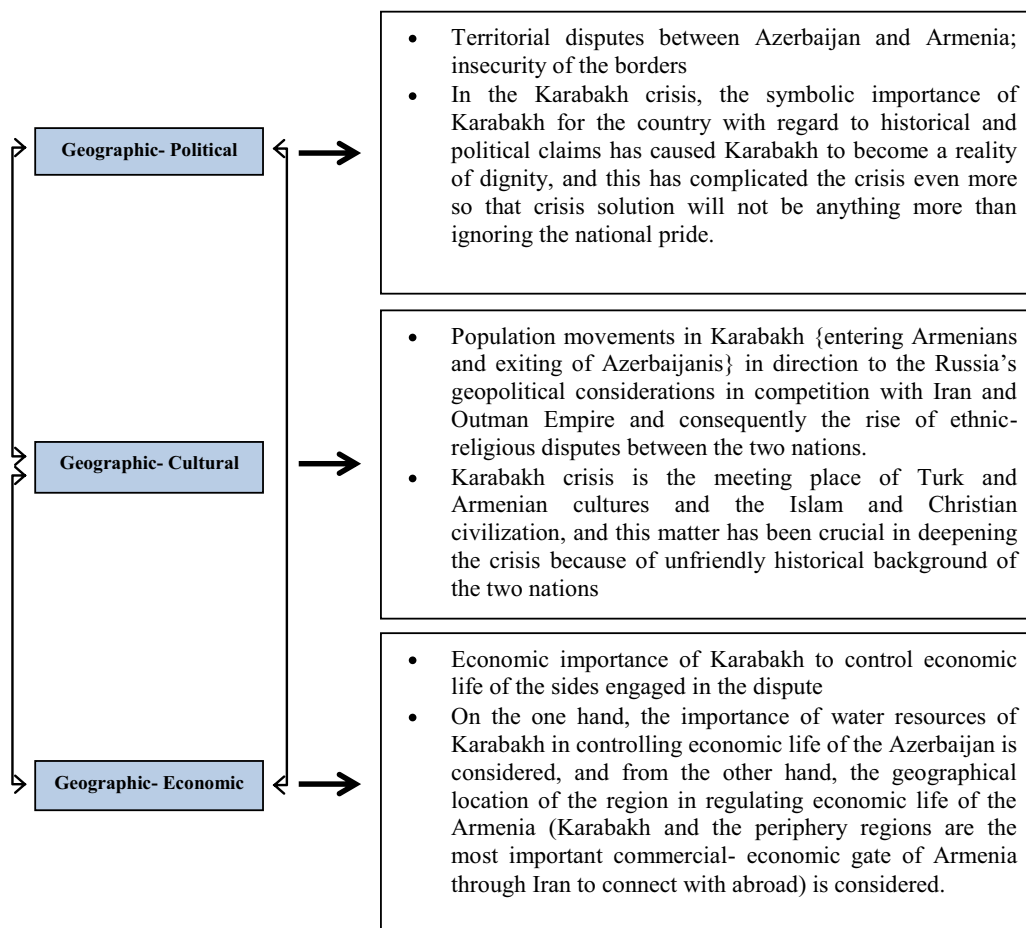


Diagram 4. Geographic disputed factors in Karabakh geopolitical crisis.

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